

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Dixie A. Jones, AHIP Medical Library Association President, 2013–2014

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As Dixie Jones's name immediately reveals, she is from the South. Her interests, her values, her strengths, and her commitment to family have all been shaped by her rural Southern heritage.

Dixie grew up in the small town of Haughton, Louisiana, surrounded by extended family. Aunts and cousins lived next door, and her paternal grandmother lived within walking distance. Dixie's father, Dorset E. Alford Jr., was a cattle farmer, so there were always cows and horses on their land. Mr.

Alford served on the Board of Directors for the local cemetery association to maintain the cemetery where Dixie's great-grandparents are buried, on land they donated years ago. Dixie has followed in her father's footsteps in this involvement, serving on the board from the 1980s to the present.

The most important influence in Dixie's future career was her mother, Dorothy Elston Alford, who was a librarian. The public library where Dixie's mother worked was only a block from their home, and

Mrs. Alford usually rode her bicycle there. Mrs. Alford's duties extended beyond the usual circulation and reference to include gardening in the library's flower bed and making homemade goodies for the children's story hours. Her commitment to this library was memorialized at her death in 1987, when the community immediately passed a resolution to name the facility for her.

Dixie's early love of reading might have provided a clue to her eventual career. As a child, she would bring a book to the dinner table, much to her sister's chagrin. Dixie recalls a special affection for Nancy Drew mysteries during her childhood.

Dixie exhibited early signs of leadership skills, serving as drum major of the band and as class president in junior high and high school. Despite days busy with tap dancing, baton twirling, and playing several musical instruments, she was still able to graduate from high school a year early.

Dixie began her first step toward her library career at Louisiana Tech University, where she majored in library science. After graduating magna cum laude with a bachelor of arts degree, she immediately headed for Louisiana State University (LSU) to earn her master of library science degree.

In high school, Dixie had gone to the prom with a classmate, Jim Jones. However, their college plans led them to different schools. After sharing a long-distance relationship for five years, Dixie and Jim married when she graduated from LSU in 1975. They moved to northwest Louisiana, where they have lived ever since.

Dixie's mother was a public librarian, but Dixie has always been interested in health sciences librarianship. Although Dixie's family commitments kept her from being

geographically mobile, she has been able to work in a variety of health sciences library environments. She began her first professional position in 1975 as assistant librarian at the Northwestern State University School of Nursing Library in Shreveport, Louisiana. As a satellite campus of the main university, there were only two librarians on staff, so Dixie was able to practice all of her newly learned skills, including reference, collection development, circulation, and bibliographic instruction. While at the School of Nursing Library, Dixie gave birth to her two children, Matt and Mandy. She recalls, "Working with nurses, I was well taken care of through the pregnancies!" [1].

In 1983, Dixie was offered a library position at the Overton Brooks VA Medical Center in Shreveport. On the day that she was scheduled to begin her work as a hospital librarian, a winter storm hit Shreveport. Her children's daycare center was closed, so she missed her first day in order to stay home with them. Despite the inauspicious beginning, Dixie soon began her reference, collection management, and interlibrary loan duties. She became more familiar with the clinical literature and learned how to search MEDLINE. The hospital administration recognized Dixie's leadership skills, and she was appointed chief of library service six years later. This new position included responsibilities for budget planning, supervision, program planning, and overall management.

After three years as chief at Overton Brooks, a hospital library, Dixie accepted the position of head of reference at LSU Health Sciences Center-Shreveport (later renamed LSU Health), an academic health sciences library, in 1991. This gave her the opportunity to concentrate on reference work, primarily running searches and answering patron questions. Recalling her childhood hero, Nancy Drew, Dixie found that she "liked the 'detective' aspect of being a reference librarian, searching for elusive answers" [2].

In 2003, Dixie returned to the Overton Brooks VA Medical Center as a solo librarian. Because the VA

had been without a librarian for a year, she returned to stacks of journals that had not been checked in. She was also surprised to discover that mannequin body parts used for teaching were stored throughout the library. She recalls that it was somewhat unsettling to discover an arm or a leg among the books and journals. Nevertheless, Dixie enjoyed being back in the hospital environment, and she began the task of rebuilding the library's services. At this time, she began working with "Librarians on Call," the VA's national virtual reference service. The purpose of "Librarians on Call" is to provide ready reference service to VA staff when the library staff at their own facility is unavailable. As cochair of the "Librarians on Call" group, Dixie worked with the leadership team to develop the procedures for the new service. She realized the importance of recordkeeping for the service and developed a tracking mechanism that is still in use.

Dixie also served on the team that rewrote *VHA Handbook 1932.01. Library Service or Section Procedures*. This handbook serves as a policy manual for VA medical center libraries. Mary Virginia Taylor, who chaired that group, recalls that she "came to depend on Dixie for her insight into how VA libraries should operate and her practical knowledge of how they really did operate" [3].

While at Overton Brooks, Dixie became administrative librarian for the South Central VA Health Care Network. The network included 10 medical centers and more than 30 outpatient clinics in 8 states, with over 17,000 employees served by the network's educational efforts. Mitzi R. Norris, director of accreditation at University of Mississippi Medical Center, was the head of education in the South Central VA Health Care Network during Dixie's tenure. She recalls that Dixie was instrumental in improving library resources throughout the network:

Through her leadership, the librarians collected information on the usage of resources and identified unique or overlapping coverage.

The group used the data to develop a core list of resources that all medical centers should have. Ms. Jones assisted in convincing the network to leverage resources to buy these essential items. This activity resulted in the negotiation of library contracts to provide equal resources for all medical centers...Ms. Jones' efforts established a pattern of assessment of resources, prioritized needs, and improved access for all clinicians. These improvements lifted the quality of care for our patients. [4]

In 2009, Dixie returned to LSU Health, this time to serve as associate director under Director Marianne Comegys. Dixie continued to develop her leadership skills as she assisted Marianne in the daily supervision of library operations, human resources activities in the library, and library facilities management. In January 2012, Marianne retired, and Dixie became the interim director. Later that year, she was appointed library director.

Throughout her career, Dixie has been active in professional organizations. She has served on numerous committees and often been appointed to special projects. She has also held top offices in many of the organizations. She served as chair of the Medical Library Association's (MLA's) Hospital Libraries Section in 1991/92. Kay E. Wellik, AHIP, FMLA, director of library services at the Mayo Clinic in Arizona, met Dixie through the Hospital Libraries Section. She recalls Dixie's success as chair: "Among her many talents was her ability to organize a meeting and in her calm, soft-spoken way, successfully lead the largest MLA section through development of standards, quality improvement, and strategic planning" [5]. Dixie has also served as president of the Health Sciences Library Association of Louisiana (1992/93) and the South Central Chapter of MLA (1996/97) and as chair of the Louisiana Library Association's (LLA's) Subject Specialists Section (1996/97).

Dixie's Southern upbringing emphasized good behavior, gracious manners, and the Golden Rule. Professionally, she has built on this

foundation with an interest in ethics. Dixie selected professional ethics as an emphasis for her year as president of the South Central Chapter. During that year, the chapter conducted an ethical audit. Members were surveyed to determine their familiarity with the ethics codes of their professional organizations, the influence of these codes on their decisions, and their reactions to ethical situations. The survey was followed up with a keynote address at the annual meeting by an expert in the field of information ethics. Dixie also edited a theme issue on ethics for the *LLA Bulletin*, the official LLA journal, and she has taught a continuing education course on ethics [6]. Dixie plans to continue her work in this area, selecting ethics as a priority for her year as MLA president.

Closely related to this subject is the concept of collegiality, librarians' relationship with one another. Dixie has researched and published on how librarians' effective interaction with one another influences the service those librarians provide to their patrons. She considers her article, "Plays Well with Others, or the Importance of Collegiality within a Reference Unit," in a 1997 issue of the *Reference Librarian*, to be the article that she most enjoyed writing [7].

Dixie's expertise in leadership is evident in her numerous publications on that topic. She recently wrote a chapter on human resources management for the *Medical Library Association Guide to Managing Health Care Libraries* (2nd edition) [8]. Coeditor Rosalind F. Dudden, AHIP, FMLA, recalls:

She was one of a kind. She met every deadline; her bibliography was in the correct format and in every detail correct; and on the final external editorial reviews, hers was the only chapter with no additions or corrections...It was a pleasure to work with her. Besides the mechanical part of the book writing process, her content was excellent, up-to-date, and professionally written. [9]

Dixie's commitment to time-honored principles is balanced by her interest in the latest technology, especially electronic health records (EHRs). Nationwide, the VA system was among the first to implement the EHR, which gave Dixie an opportunity to learn about this technology early in its development. Dixie initiated efforts at Overton Brooks to get library resources placed in the EHR. She also assisted patients with registering for and using MyHealtheVet, the VA's personal health record (PHR). When Dixie moved to LSU Health-Shreveport, she again worked to get library resources into the EHR. When the LSU statewide system converted to the Epic EHR, she collaborated with computer services personnel to integrate MedlinePlus Connect into MyChart, the LSU Health-Shreveport PHR. She was also the principal investigator for a funded project to familiarize LSU Health-Shreveport patients with the availability of their PHRs. In addition to sharing her expertise on this topic through numerous publications and presentations, Dixie also chaired the MLA/National Library of Medicine Joint Electronic Personal Health Record Task Force. Jean P. Shipman, AHIP, FMLA, recalls appointing Dixie to this position:

I knew that she would be able to deal with the ambiguity of this product and its current market to be able to help define potential roles for medical librarians. Dixie gladly accepted this position and led a wonderful exploration into PHRs, which included creating an inventory of what PHRs currently existed, cataloging their characteristics, and encouraging MLA members to take a part in educating consumers about them. The task force worked diligently under Dixie's strategic guidance and its findings were published in a [*Journal of the Medical Library Association (JMLA)*] article. Dixie made this task force work fun and encouraged all of its members to divide the work load and conquer. [10]

Like so many librarians of the baby boomer generation, Dixie's career has overlapped from the time when nothing was online or automated to today's electronic collections. She has excelled in facing these changes by following her philosophy, a modification of Nike's "Just do it" slogan: "To learn something, just get in there and do it." But Dixie's secret to her success is realizing that the principles that she learned from her Southern librarian mother years ago do not change: "In spite of evolving technology and changing trends, principles regarding management, service to patrons, and designing things from the user perspective to be user friendly and 'findable' hold true today as they did in 1975" [11].

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